Extemporaneous Sight Calling, The System

***Extemporaneous,* with out previous study or meditation; on the spur of the moment**

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Revised 2-17

SIGHT CALLING, THE SYSTEM

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Many types of calling systems are in existence today and for the most part all are being used to some extent. We will be looking at one that I have been using for some time which leaves me a lot of freedom to expand and adjust, SIGHT CALLING.

After 22 years of talking with callers (new & experienced) about how the system works, I have come to the conclusion that as they try to learn it they tend to lump all the parts of SIGHT CALLING together into one single entity causing them difficulty. I will break SIGHT CALLING down into three separate parts as I understand them.

The three parts are:

1) Recognition (remembering the dancers)
- a) Choosing your **PRIMARY & SECONDARY COUPLES.**
- b) Snapshot.

2) The Dance (choreography)
- a) Homework.
- b) Calling hints.

3) Resolution (finding the corner)

RECOGNITION:

a) Choosing and remembering your PRIMARY & SECONDARY COUPLES so you can do part #3.

Some callers always try to use #1 couple as their **PRIMARY COUPLE** . **Don't fall into that trap!** The #1 couple is not always the easiest to remember. Dancers don't always square up that way for me and they won't for you. The number designation of your **PRIMARY COUPLE** in the square should be of no concern to you. Example: you may use #3 couple as your **PRIMARY COUPLE** in one square, #2 in another and so on. At your own groups pick your **PRIMARY COUPLES** from "*People you know so well you don't have to think about them."* Always use the same **PRIMARY COUPLES.** Now, all you have to remember is the couple **ON THE PRIMARY COUPLE'S LEFT (the SECONDARY COUPLE.)**

Again:

In your own groups always use the same PRIMARY COUPLES. If you get two **PRIMARY COUPLES** in the same square, use another square to avoid confusion or write down which couple you are using as **PRIMARY.**

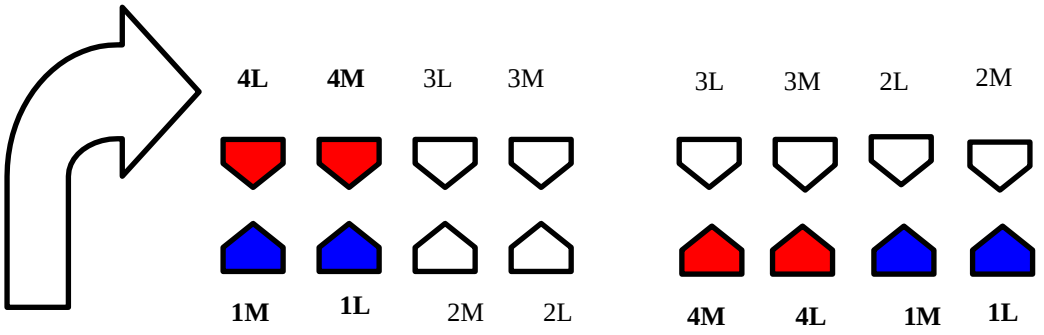
I have one basic rule: **NO WORK.** If I have to work at remembering the **PRIMARY COUPLE**, I am doing it wrong!.

REMEMBER....NO WORK!!!!.

While people are squaring up, **LOOK AROUND....PICK THE EASY SQUARES TO SIGHT.** Try to pick the best dancers as your **PRIMARY COUPLES.**...Remember, they will be the ones you find your corner with, so **they will make YOU look good**. If you are not calling in your own group, look for attributes to help you remember people: **MATCHING OUTFITS, TALL, FAT, SEXY, LIMP, BALD, etc. (Anything that stands out to YOU).** This way you are only thinking of one couple (the **SECONDARY)** in each square enabling you sight up to 2 or 3 squares easily (4 to 6 or more eventually). If you look at a square and nothing stands out, **DO NOT USE THAT SQUARE, FIND ANOTHER ONE.**

b) SNAPSHOT (helping you to remember)

At first call figures to get everybody into 1P-2P lines (hds lead right, circle 4, break to lines.) Next, take a look at only one of your chosen squares. Find the couple on the left the **PRIMARY COUPLE.** This is your **SECONDARY COUPLE.**



Let's use #1 couple as PRIMARY & #4 couple as SECONDARY
Notice #4 couple is to the left of #1 couple (1P-2P line.) Anytime they are here you are ready to call a LA or use a " get out."

Call something to bring this square back to the same lines (pass thru, w&d, dpt, first left, next right) ....**TAKE A MENTAL SNAPSHOT** of this line then call some things and go for your corner. Next, continue this until you have taken each of your 3 squares to lines and then to the corner. This will keep these people in your mind throughout the tip **"IT REALLY WORKS!"**

DO NOT USE THIS SYSTEM AT A REGULAR DANCE UNLESS YOU FEEL CONFIDENT. (THE RULE FOR USING THIS SYSTEM IS " NO WORK." IF IT FEELS LIKE WORK, YOU ARE EITHER NOT QUITE READY, OR DOING IT WRONG.) Try this out on a sympathetic square in your basement, or your class if you have one. No one will care if you miss your corner: you will find most dancers willing to help. At first you may want to write the **SECONDARY COUPLE** down so that in case you forget them you can pick up the square again very quickly. Also, you can practice this at any dance you attend as a dancer. Just pick a **PRIMARY** and a **SECONDARY COUPLE** and look for them as the caller (under pressure) goes to his corner. See how many times the **SECONDARY COUPLE** is on the left of the **PRIMARY COUPLE** as he calls his tip (good practice, no pressure on you to find the corner.)

THE DANCE :
I started out like everyone else and just tried sight calling unaware of how much I didn't know about the choreography I thought I knew. I found myself unsure of the next formation and therefore called in a stop and wait manner in order to find out what I could call next. I was lucky to be doing this to only four couples as they danced in my basement. I then attended a callers' school with Jack Lasry and found out from him that to be successful at sight calling, **I MUST DO THE HOMEWORK FIRST.**

Do THE HOMEWORK

DO NOT TRY SIGHT CALLING UNTIL YOU HAVE DONE YOUR HOMEWORK !!!.

1. Know the **starting** and **ending** positions of **each figure** *before you call it* !.

2. Using your choreography checkers to prove your work, take the Mainstream (**yes, the Mainstream**) List and make a list of positions. Example:

Square Thru 4

Starting pos.		Ending Pos.
Squared up	SQ4=	Eight Chain Thru
Eight Chain Thru	SQ4=	Lines facing out
Lines Facing in	SQ4=	Trade By
Trade By	SQ4=	Squared up (facing out)

Continue this list until you know the positions of all the Basic & Mainstream calls. USE THIS KNOWLEDGE as you call to your practise groups. Then, as you gain confidence, do the same with the Mainstream Plus List. ***Note: As you call, do not worry what sex anyone faces, or whom anyone has as a partner. Just remember the starting and ending positions of EACH CALL.*** This may seem to be a lot of work, but you already know much of this information. Eventually you will be free to call whatever the dancers on the floor can handle easily. You can pay more attention to the flow, overflow, speed, dancer ability, fun factor, sound, and other things going on during the tip. A rapport will develop between you and the dancers.

Remember:
1)If the dancers don't dance, they won't have fun.
2) If the squares fail, you may not get a corner.

b) CALLING HINTS

Call what you know and you won't get into trouble with unknown positions. Expand your knowledge by continuing the homework.

Don't call "all position" because you can. Make sure your dancers can handle what you are calling and help them get through the tougher choreography by cueing the trouble spots if needed.

Learn how to set up different ways to get to formations. Example: Starting from a Box formation, Circulate 1 1/2 to a Diamond. This will add some dimension to your calling ability and some variety for your dancers.

Be aware that as SIGHT CALLING starts to feel comfortable to you (especially if you are sighting well with a group) you will tend to expand the length of your tips. Use the 1 1/2 times through the record rule and stick to it.

Pay attention to the flow of your dance. When what I call "hiccups in flow" occur, squares tend to break down killing your chances of finding a corner. Some examples of bad flow: From anywhere-Star Thru, Veer Left; from waves-Walk & Dodge, Tag the Line; Slide Thru, Dive Thru.

Work on sight timing rather than using filler words for timing. Don't "stack" calls, you should be giving your commands 4 beats before the dancers finish the last figure you called.

Most note services provide a page or two of complete figure sequences (from static square to Left Allemand) to demonstrate the uses of a featured call. When you look at these pages in note services, search for the sequences that fit together well and the setups that lead to nice "get outs." Pick and choose the best parts: it isn't necessary to memorize or call the whole group of figures from beginning to end. Find the starting and ending positions for the note service parts that you like and remember them. When you get to a position in your own choreography that you recognize as a starting position for a certain part or "get out," you may use it from there.

Do not follow your PRIMARY and SECONDARY COUPLES around, watch the whole dance and adjust as needed to keep your dancers dancing.

Do not look at only one square while calling, look at all the squares so they can see you paying attention to them. They paid at the door to dance to **YOU**. If you want them back, entertain them with good solid choreography, good singing calls and great music.

Pay attention to how you stand and look to the dancers. They don't miss much.

Don't call the same old stuff the same old way. Add variety to the dance by using R&L Grand "get outs," and surprise "get outs" all within the dancers' abilities. If the dancers don't know what you are going to call, they won't anticipate your next call and will dance your dance with fewer breakdowns (see hint below.)

Hint:
From Ken Bower that I have been using for many years. If you want the dancers to listen and not anticipate your next move use a tricky or different opener that says "I had better listen to this guy the whole tip."

RESOLUTION:
After calling some choreography, you will decide to resolve to the corner. At the beginning, I showed you how to take a **MENTAL SNAPSHOT.** Here is where you apply it: pick a square from those you chose as your pilot squares. Remembering what you saw when you took your **SNAPSHOT**, try to put your **PRIMARY** and **SECONDARY COUPLES** together. In the beginning, while you are learning to SIGHT CALL, you may resolve using the following steps:

1) Put the **PRIMARY MAN** with his partner in the **LEFT** side of a normal facing line of 4 (girl on right.) This will normally take about 4 to 7 calls to do.

2) Look at the **SECONDARY MAN**.
A) If he has his original partner and is across from the **PRIMARY COUPLE,** you have 1P-2P lines. From here you can call a Left Allemand or do a memorized "get out" or gimmick such as: Slide Thru, Square Thru 3/4, Left Allemand.

B) If he has his original partner and is on the right side in the same line as the **PRIMARY COUPLE**, he is out of sequence. Call what you know will get him back in sequence or call a "get out" from here such as : Star Thru, Pass Thru, Left Allemand.

C) If the **SECONDARY MAN** does not have his original partner, **he must have his opposite.**

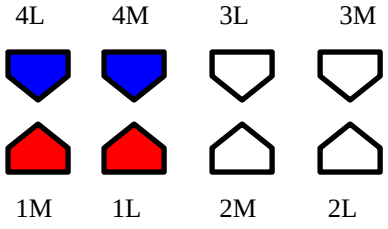
a) If you Pass Thru, Wheel and Deal, one of two moves will give you the corner. Check out the center of the square and determine which of these calls will bring the **SECONDARY GIRL** to the **PRIMARY MAN** for a Left Allemande: Square Thru 3/4 (LA,) or Pass Thru (LA.)

b) An alternative strategy would be to put the people who are not with partner together (and keep them together) till you get them into lines in sequence (1P- 2P lines; see example below) and use a known "get out." If you use another system i.e. Mental Imagery, Modules etc. , you can switch to that system.

After you think you have the square solved and before you actually call the Left Allemand, (or otherwise continue,) look at another pilot square (**SNAPSHOT** time again.) If the **PRIMARY** and **SECONDARY COUPLE** relationships in two or more squares look right, go for it! If things don't look right, change pilot squares and put them together using the above procedure. If these two squares seem correct, use them to resolve assuming someone in the first square made an error.

If the whole floor is mixed up, pick the square that has not had the best track record that tip and let them win.

If a pilot square is still dancing and someone gets on the wrong side (half sashayed,) you can save that square and not effect the rest of the squares. For example: If you're calling a BASIC or MS PLUS level tip; from Lines: call Pass Thru, Ends Fold, Star Thru (say, "Check your line," to stop any bad flow from the Bend the Line action) Bend the Line (all boys now have a girl on his right.) If you're calling Advanced; call Brace Thru.(half breed thru)



Sequence for corner: if you can reach out and touch your corner < *No one in between*> you are in sequence for a LA or another special "get out."

Call your figures... do not follow any one dancer as you call. When you are ready to resolve the square, get your lines (1P-2P.) Then check more than one square for correctness. If two are the same...GO FOR THE CORNER.

TIPS:
Use this system exactly as it is described until you feel confident. Eventually you will find short cuts and variations popping into your head enabling you to find your corner much faster without having to put your square into lines.

THINGS TO LIVE BY:
Since the better dancers tend to dance at the front of the hall, some callers tend to watch only one square (sometimes exclusively.) ***DANCERS NOTICE THIS...***...and will comment about it to each other. They will also assume a caller is catering to his favorite dancers! Also, if a caller sight times to the front squares he will be calling too fast for the back squares (usually the poorer or less experienced dancers.) The best ones to sight time to are at the center of the hall *(THE AVERAGE DANCERS.)* Look all around the hall while calling.....when it's time to look for your corner, check the *GOOD SQUARES* (more then one square) and go for your 1P-2P lines. Then, do whatever you want to get your corner.

The 1P-2P line is also a good place to throw in special "get outs" or let your other system take over. *(YOU CAN FLIP BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN SYSTEMS.)*

My first tip at a regular dance (not my own club or a group I call for regularly,) is a memorized or Mental Image tip. I use this tip to pick out the good squares and to find out what the floor can handle.
REMEMBER..... YOU NEED TO HAVE PEOPLE DANCING IN ORDER TO FIND YOUR CORNER.
As you use this system, it becomes much easier until it is second nature.

Use commands like centers & ends instead of boys & girls when you know your ending positions, but not what sexes are facing or if they are sashayed, same sex partners, etc.. If two of the same sex are facing and you call a Star Thru, you can be embarrassed. With the normal things you call all the time it isn't necessary to say centers and ends, but it really helps to avoid making mistakes like 1/2 sashay R&L Thru with the girl turning the boy etc.! With practice you'll know when a call is "legal."

ADVANTAGES TO SIGHT CALLING:
You do not have to spend hours upon hours coming up with zeros and equivalents and memorizing lots of little facts about each call, whether it chained the ladies, etc.. You only need the beginning and ending positions and practical knowledge of how the figure WORKS and FLOWS to do the call. Sight Calling gives the caller a lot of creativity to his choreography and allows the caller to use a lot of material. The caller can then enjoy the dance as much as his or her dancers do.

LAST NOTES:
TEACH YOUR DANCERS TO TOUCH HANDS AFTER THE COMPLETION OF ALL FIGURES AND AT ALL KEY SPOTS WITHIN THE FIGURES...THIS WILL MAKE BETTER DANCERS, TIGHTER SQUARES AND (MOST OF ALL) FEWER BREAKDOWNS .

DANCE AS OFTEN AS YOU CAN. IT WILL REINFORCE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AS WELL AS DEMONSTRATE WHICH FIGURE COMBINATIONS FLOW BEST AND WHICH ONES TO AVOID.

GOOD LUCK..IF YOU NEED HELP, CALL OR WRITE AND I WILL TRY TO HELP YOU AS MUCH AS TIME ALLOWS.

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Figure	Stating Formation	Ending Formation
Square Thru	Static Square Eight Chain Thru Lines Facing In Trade By	Eight Chain Thru Lines Facing Out Trade By Static Square (Facing Out)

Notes: